



watford
community
housing

**Annual report to
residents 2019/20**



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Welcome



A message from our Chair

Welcome to our annual report for 2019/20, which sets out our key achievements so that you can see how we are performing. As always, our priority throughout the year has been on providing the high-quality homes and excellent services that you expect from us.

We achieved a huge amount over the last 12 months, as you'll be able to see from the report. As well as a range of improvements to how we deliver services, we have continued to upgrade homes to make sure they are modern and safe.

Three years on from the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, there is more focus than ever on what landlords are doing to ensure residents' safety and wellbeing. We have continued to invest in this area and we are proud to be leading the way in delivering safety enhancements to our homes.

However, it was also a challenging year – particularly with the coronavirus crisis, which has affected every one of us enormously. We had to adapt very quickly in response to the pandemic, finding new ways of working and putting in place a range of measures to allow us to continue providing the most vital services to our communities safely.

I believe we responded extremely well to these pressures but, inevitably, we were unable to deliver some of our day-to-day services during this time. This was because of the need to prioritise emergencies and work that directly affected people's safety and wellbeing. I'd like to thank you for your patience as we worked hard to get up and running again, in line with the government's guidance.

In March 2020, we also experienced a data incident that affected a large number of our customers. We understand just how important trust is to people and we know that this raised concerns for many residents. I want to reassure you that we took the incident extremely seriously. We did all we could to respond quickly to the error and offer comprehensive support to everyone affected. This has subsequently been acknowledged by the Information Commissioner's Office.

We have recently retained our V1 rating for viability and our G1 rating for governance following an in-depth assessment by the Regulator of Social Housing. This demonstrates that we are well-governed and we are more determined than ever to show you that we are deserving of your trust going forward.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to working closely with residents so that you can help to shape our future. If you have any feedback on this report or our services, please do get in touch.

John Swinney
Chair



A message from our Chief Executive

2019/20 marked the final year in our 2016-2020 business plan. Although the government's rent reduction programme had a significant impact on our finances over this period, it was a very successful four years as we achieved the key goals set out in our plan.

These included improvements to many of our services, making life easier for our customers and helping to ensure that we meet your expectations. We worked to build community capacity by supporting local projects and offering more through our community hubs, in line with our goals as a Community Gateway housing association.

By developing strong partnerships with other organisations we are delivering more for local people and have become an active developer of much-needed new homes. We have also made sure that we remain on a strong financial footing so that we can continue to grow and provide great services for you in the future.

We will soon be launching our new 2020-2025 business plan, although it has been delayed slightly because of the coronavirus pandemic. We will continue to build on the great work of the last four years, with a plan that puts customers at the heart of our work.

During 2019/20, we consulted residents about our priorities for the next five years and what you told us will form the basis of our Customer Promise, which will be at the centre of the new business plan. We will also look to keep growing so that we can deliver even more, as well as working with local authorities to build more homes for the people who need them most.

We know just how important people's homes are to them. We've all had to spend more time than ever in our homes as a result of the pandemic and, as employers have adapted to new ways of working, it's also likely that lots of people will spend more time working from home in the future. We're proud of the vital role we play in people's lives and we're committed to carrying on providing high-quality homes that help to keep people safe, comfortable and happy over the years to come.

Tina Barnard
Chief Executive

“We achieved a huge amount over the last 12 months. As well as a range of improvements to how we deliver services, we have continued to upgrade homes to make sure they are modern and safe.”

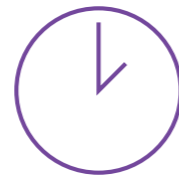
“We're proud of the vital role we play in people's lives and we're committed to carrying on providing high-quality homes that help to keep people safe, comfortable and happy over the years to come.”

Our performance

We're committed to delivering great services that meet your expectations. We are always looking to improve, so we monitor your feedback carefully to make sure we know what we do well and where we should work to get better.



89% satisfaction with our customer service centre

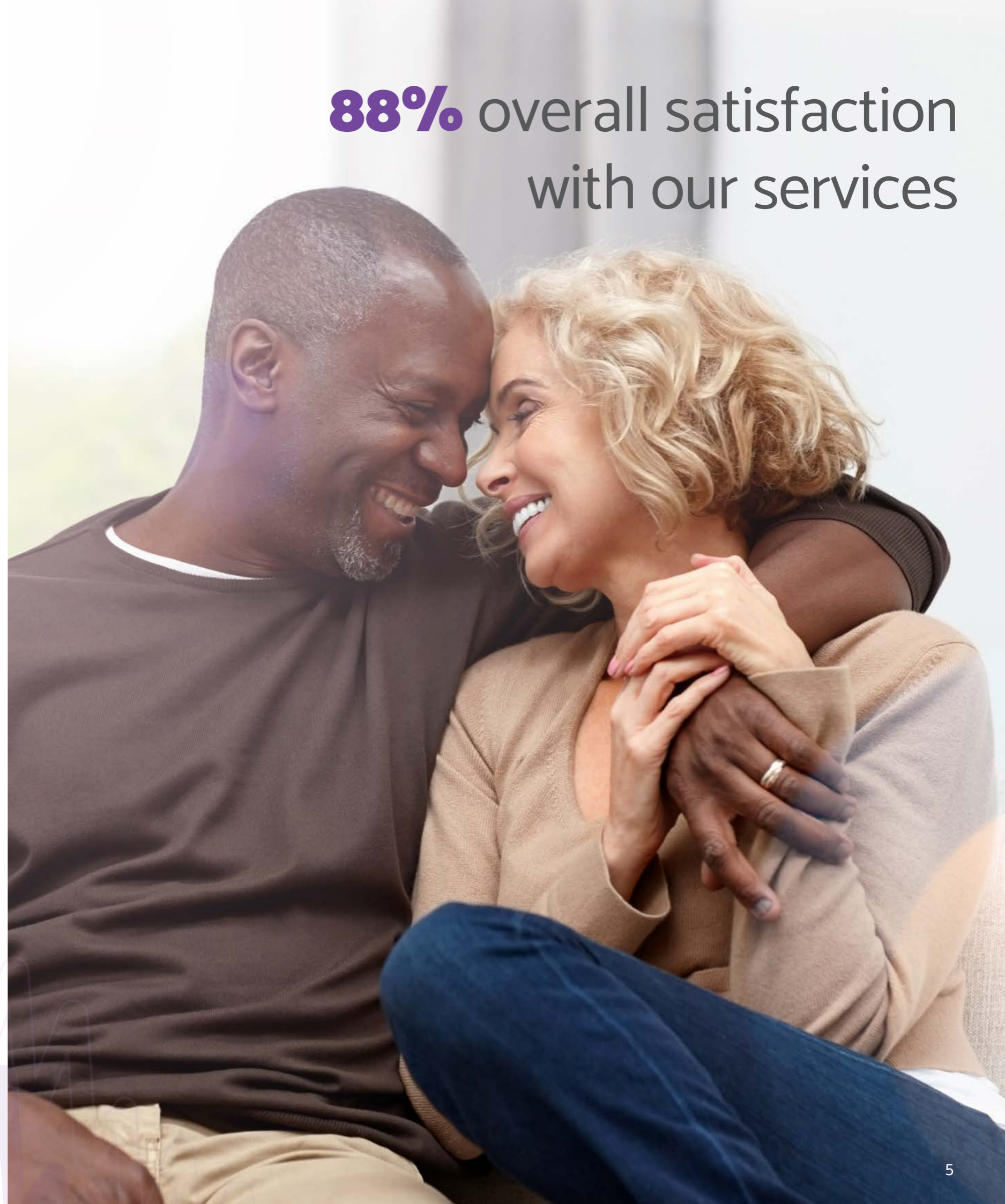


21 seconds – the average waiting time for a call to customer services



80% of queries were resolved on the first call

88% overall satisfaction with our services



Listening to you

We love getting feedback, whether good or bad. In 2019/20, we received 5,221 pieces of feedback from our customers – which we've used to identify areas where improvement is needed and continue to increase satisfaction levels.

The transparency of our service is really important to us. That's why, in Autumn 2019, we created a new feedback page on our website where you can see an up-to-date report on how we are performing, including customer testimonials and easy-to-read statistics.

It also includes a 'You said, we did' section, which allows you to find out about changes we've made in response to your feedback. The page is updated regularly, so you can see how we use your feedback and how we are performing in real-time.

To make sure that problems are resolved as quickly as possible, we also simplified our complaints process. It now has only two stages instead of three and we have also cut the number of days we take to respond to complaints.

New ways to tell us what you think

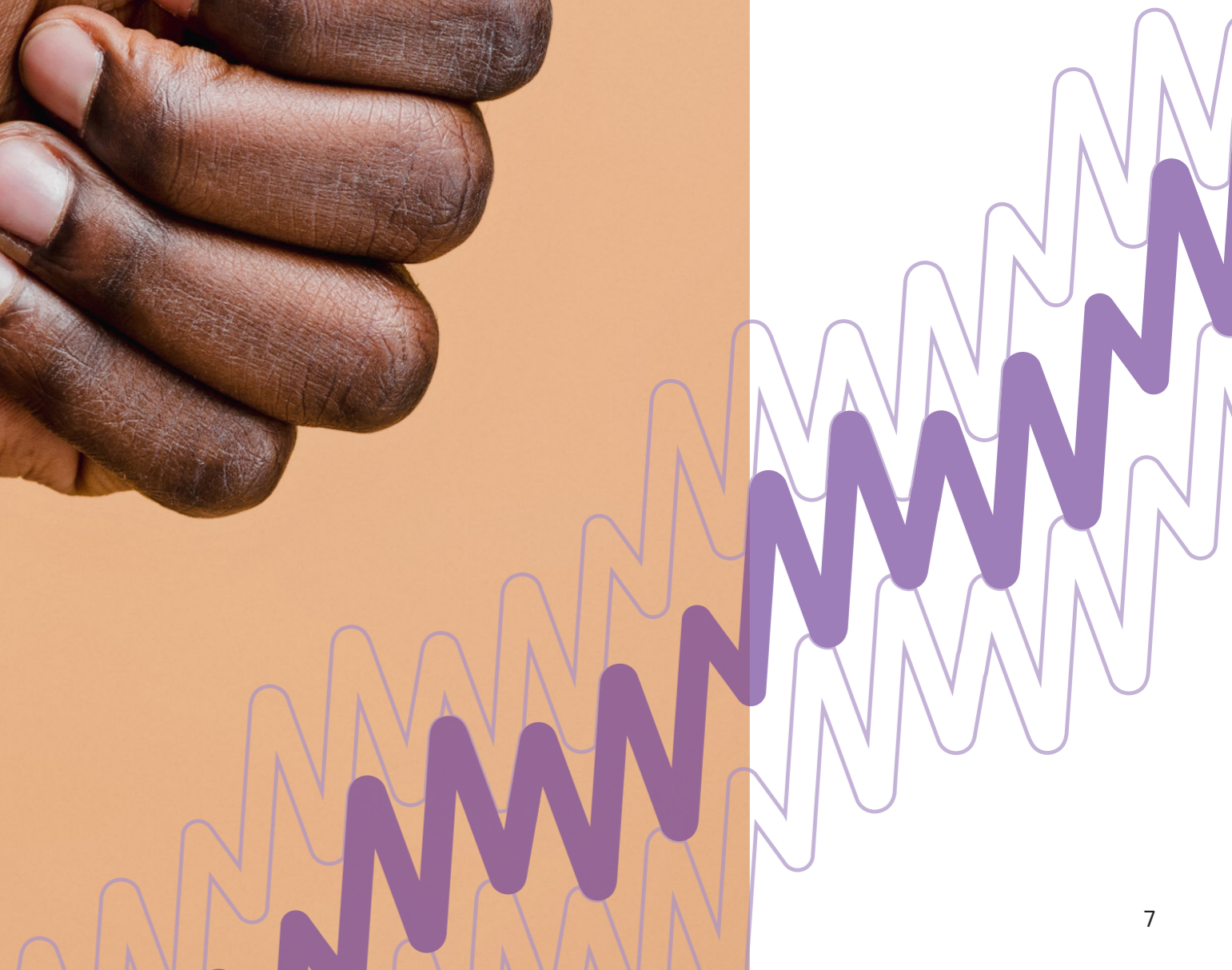
Throughout 2019/20 we surveyed customers about our feedback process and how we could deal with complaints more quickly. With the findings, we began work to move to a new digital feedback system. Using the Feefo platform, we have created a more streamlined service to gather your feedback, saving you time and allowing us to respond in real-time. It will be going live during 2020.



We received **468 compliments (52%)** vs **423 complaints (48%)** this year



92% of complaints were resolved at the first stage of our complaints process





Dealing with the coronavirus pandemic

Like all businesses, we had to make significant and rapid changes to how we operate and deliver services in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Our top priority at all times is the safety and wellbeing of our customers, staff and communities.

In the early stages of the coronavirus lockdown, the regulations required us to close our office and our community hubs, while limiting our services to essential and emergency works only. Once the government guidance allowed us to, we started to provide less urgent services again – making sure we had put in place thorough safety measures to minimise the risk of infection.

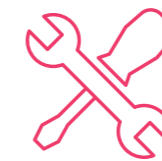
We offered support to customers throughout the crisis, especially to our most vulnerable residents and those affected by coronavirus. In particular, our Tenancy Support team stepped up its services to assist people who had been hit financially, providing guidance and helping them to manage their rent payments and apply for Universal Credit.

We set up a dedicated welfare fund, offering grants to customers for a range of emergency situations, such as the replacement of essential household items and funeral expenses for people who had lost family members. We also supported local charities and community groups who helped people impacted by the pandemic, with grant funding from our Community Development Fund.

91% satisfaction with repairs service



High-quality homes



82% of repairs were fixed first time

We work hard to keep your home well-maintained and comfortable by delivering repairs and planned improvement works. Throughout 2019/20, we maintained 100% building safety management across the board – because our top priority is ensuring your home is the safe place it should be.

Improving our repairs service

In 2019, we made some changes to how our repairs team work, so that we can deliver a better service for you.

Our planners are now each assigned to specific types of repair, so that they regularly work with the same operatives and can see every job through from start to finish. This helps planners and operatives to build more effective working relationships and ensures that the planner already has knowledge of the job if follow-on works are needed. By improving the communication within the team, we can now provide a more consistent and reliable service for residents.

We also implemented a new system with the ability to store photos against works orders for all our repairs. Our operatives now take 'before' and 'after' photos of each repair, which help us if we need to investigate any additional problems. They can be viewed by our Customer Service team too, making it easier for them to assist with customer queries about repairs that have been carried out.

These changes helped us to achieve an improved customer satisfaction level of 91% for our repairs service in 2019/20 (up from 88% in 2018/19).

99% satisfaction with improvement programme works



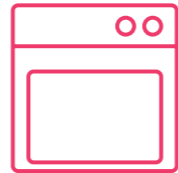
Enhancing your home

Our improvement programme continued throughout 2019/20, with more than 500 homes benefiting from upgrades. We also maintained very high customer satisfaction levels for the work we carried out.

We upgraded a number of buildings to make them safer and more secure for residents. This included fitting new door entry systems at Colborne House and Gosford House, as well as at Abbey View and Munden View – our high-rise blocks – which also benefited from brand new CCTV systems.

We invested more than £300,000 in comprehensive fire safety measures for our blocks, going above and beyond the minimum regulations to make sure that our buildings are as resistant as possible to the spread of fire. In line with the Hackitt Review that was published following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, we have also been working more closely with residents to revise our fire strategy so that it takes customers' concerns into account. We have reviewed the guidance for each of our blocks individually for the new strategy, which will be launched in 2020.

We also made major improvements to our overall approach to health and safety during 2019/20, helping to ensure that our customers and our staff are kept safe. We appointed a dedicated Building Safety Manager, who is responsible for the safety of our homes, and we made changes to our protocols, management and culture around health and safety. As a result, we were awarded a four-star 'Very Good' rating by the British Safety Council in January 2020 – a significant improvement on our two-star 'Adequate' rating from the year before.



46 new kitchens



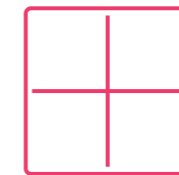
47 roofs upgraded



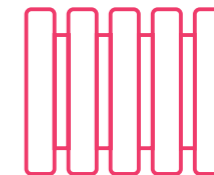
31 homes fitted with new doors



72 new bathrooms

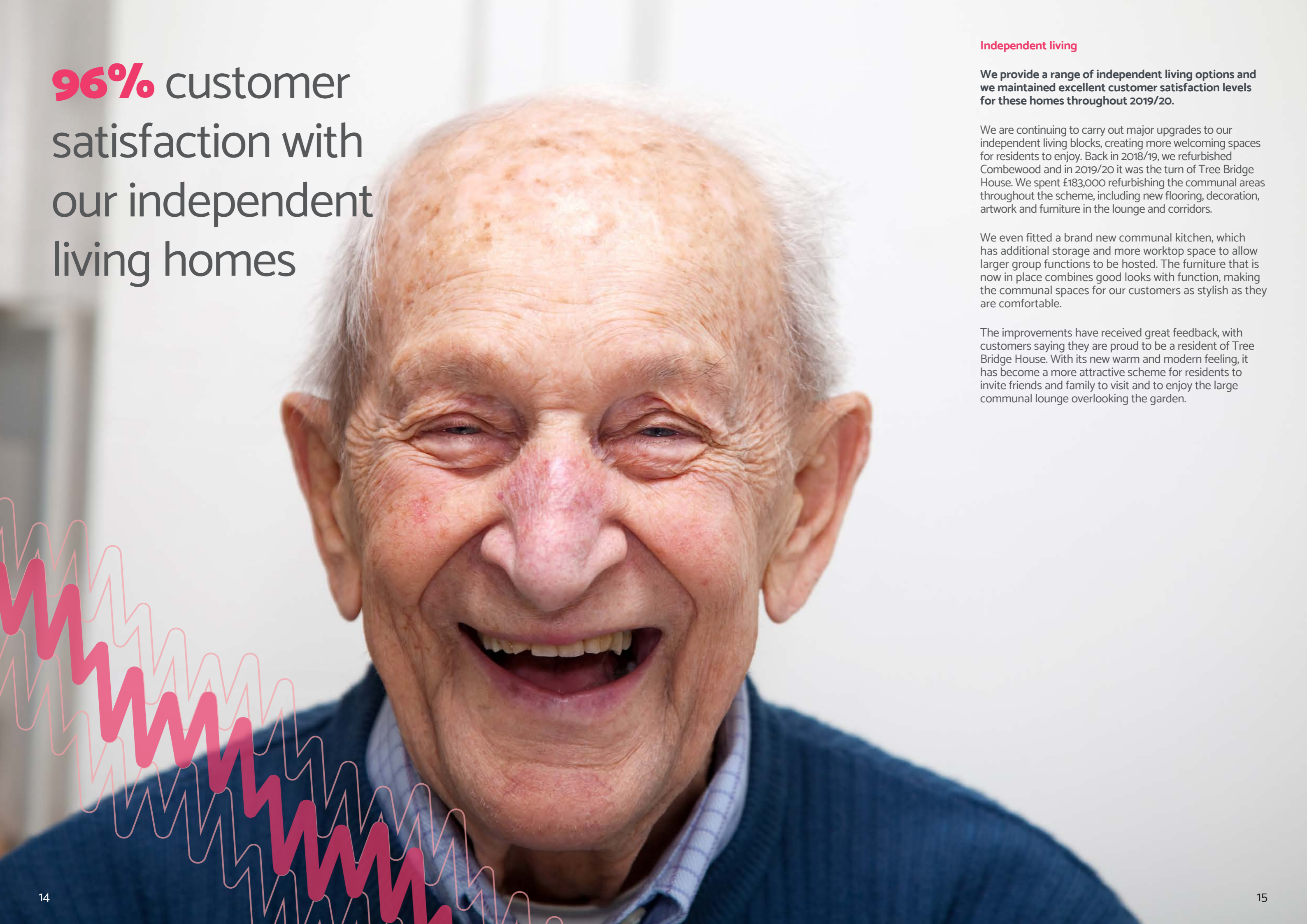


98 homes fitted with new windows



300 homes fitted with new boilers and/or radiators

96% customer satisfaction with our independent living homes



Independent living

We provide a range of independent living options and we maintained excellent customer satisfaction levels for these homes throughout 2019/20.

We are continuing to carry out major upgrades to our independent living blocks, creating more welcoming spaces for residents to enjoy. Back in 2018/19, we refurbished Combewood and in 2019/20 it was the turn of Tree Bridge House. We spent £183,000 refurbishing the communal areas throughout the scheme, including new flooring, decoration, artwork and furniture in the lounge and corridors.

We even fitted a brand new communal kitchen, which has additional storage and more worktop space to allow larger group functions to be hosted. The furniture that is now in place combines good looks with function, making the communal spaces for our customers as stylish as they are comfortable.

The improvements have received great feedback, with customers saying they are proud to be a resident of Tree Bridge House. With its new warm and modern feeling, it has become a more attractive scheme for residents to invite friends and family to visit and to enjoy the large communal lounge overlooking the garden.

Enhancing neighbourhoods

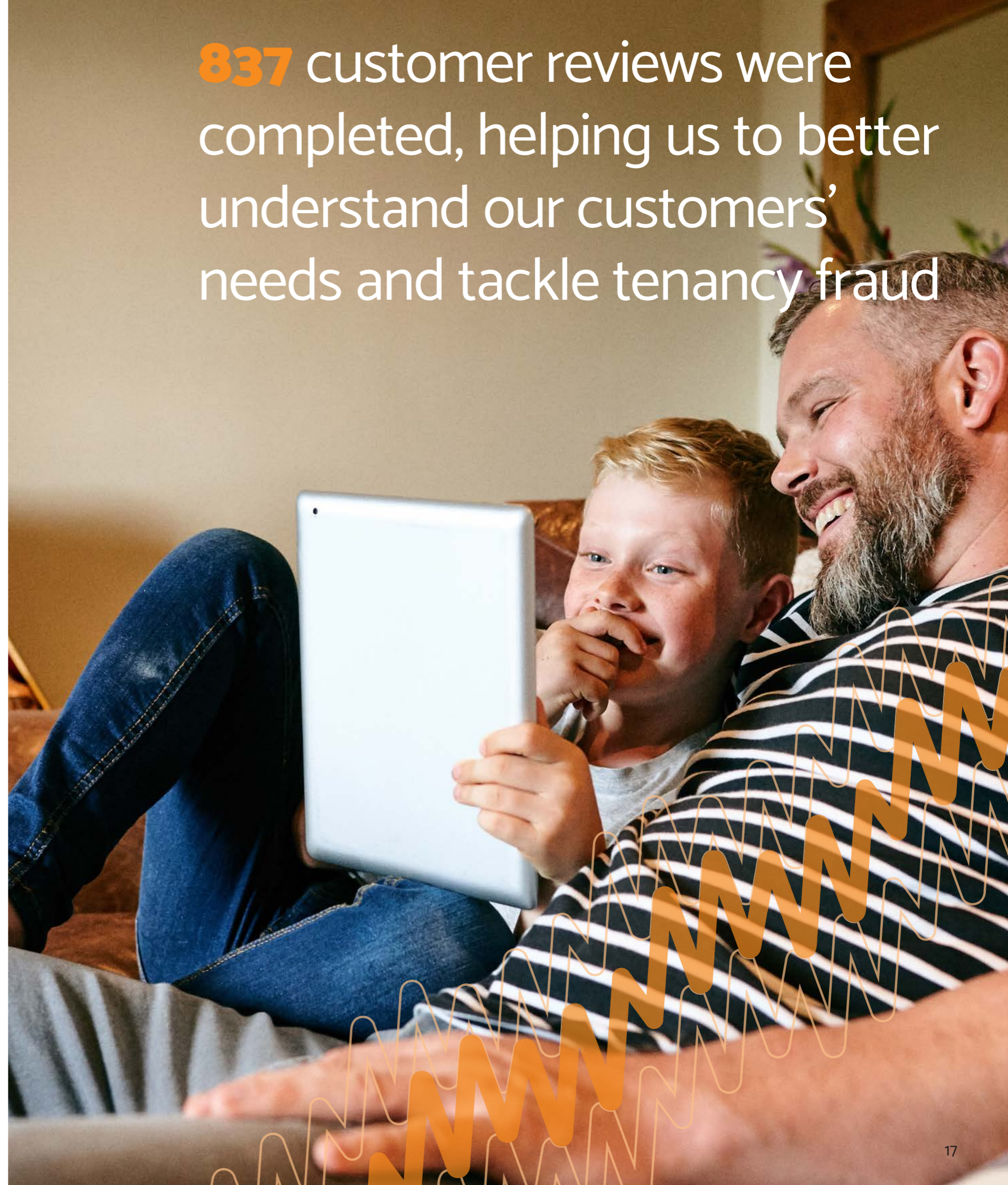
In 2019/20, we really stepped up our neighbourhoods activities, to keep people and places safe. With a greater presence in our neighbourhoods and a commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour issues, we focused on ensuring your communities are the welcoming and happy places they should be.

Keeping you safe

Throughout 2019/20, we worked to tackle higher-level anti-social behaviour issues. Our strong relationships with local organisations, including the police, mean we have been able to deal effectively with several cases of 'cuckooing' and other gang-related crimes in our neighbourhoods.

As part of our commitment to supporting those most in need, our Neighbourhoods team also delivers high-quality temporary accommodation services. This year we won the tender to continue managing Watford Borough Council's temporary accommodation, meaning we can ensure our most vulnerable customers have a safe and secure place to call their own. We also took on the management of The Bury, a new block in Rickmansworth, adding to the portfolio of properties we look after for Three Rivers District Council.

837 customer reviews were completed, helping us to better understand our customers' needs and tackle tenancy fraud





On average, we dealt with **57 anti-social behaviour cases** each month



62 safeguarding referrals were made, to protect potentially vulnerable people



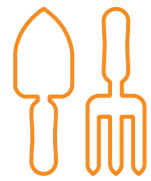
11 of our key policies and procedures were refreshed, including those for anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse, to better safeguard our customers



We helped **11** households to 'rightsize' by moving into properties better suited to their needs



67% satisfaction with our cleaning service



70% satisfaction with our grounds maintenance service



Looking out for your estate

2019/20 was the first year of our contract with Accuro for cleaning and grounds maintenance in and around our blocks. We worked closely with them throughout the year to ensure you are getting the level of service you expect and we will continue to monitor this closely over the coming months and years.

One of the great things Accuro has brought to the service is a fleet of electric vehicles, helping to minimise their environmental impact and supporting our commitment to delivering sustainable services.

Our Estates Officers continued to work to ensure that blocks and neighbourhoods are well maintained throughout the year. To allow them to work more effectively for you, we created a new phone app that has been designed specifically for the team so that they can report and track repairs efficiently whilst on the move.

We enjoyed great success with community clean-up days. Neighbourhood Officers, Estates Officers and other volunteers from Watford Community Housing took to Boundary Way and Radlett Road to tidy up areas of the neighbourhood and provide support and information to local residents.

Responding to residents

Every year, we consult residents in some of our local community areas to put together Neighbourhood Plans, which identify practical improvements that we can make. In 2019/20, 226 customers participated in surveys that we carried out in Courtlands, Rookery and Woodside.

Residents identified anti-social behaviour, parking and building exteriors as key issues. With £15,000 allocated to each area we worked to identify a plan to tackle the issues raised and communicated the physical improvements we were making through local targeted mailings.

These included new external décor for our Longcroft independent living scheme and security enhancements to outside spaces, such as installing new lighting and cutting back shrubs to improve the safety of alleyways. We also identified some areas where parking bays could be installed and are in discussions with partner agencies who are responsible for providing parking.

123 people engaged with us through our Involvement Menu



Caring for your communitiy



16 customers were involved in approving funding bids by email

One of the most important ways we can support our residents is by helping their communities flourish. Throughout 2019/20 we worked tirelessly with residents, partners and local groups to provide support to communities and help people live better lives.

Giving residents a voice

We're committed to giving our customers opportunities to get involved in our work. Through our Involvement Menu, individuals can choose from a wide range of ways to engage with us, finding something that fits in with their other commitments and suits their skills. In 2019/20, 123 people engaged with us through the Involvement Menu, helping to give residents a voice and influence what we do.



53 projects supported through funding bids

Funding our communities' future

We have two main funding streams to support projects, events, organisations and groups in our local communities. These play a vital role in bringing people together and improving neighbourhoods. In 2019/20, the Community Development Fund benefited 23 different projects, while Community Chest grants of up to £500 provided funding for smaller initiatives and events.

In 2019/20, eight active Tenants'/Residents' Association groups continued to provide a focal point for our communities, with the help of funding awards totalling £5.3k from Watford Community Housing.

We also carried on working with other community groups, such as Nifty Fifties – which now has 398 members and organises events and other social opportunities for people aged over 50. Another group we provided continuing assistance to was Solo Stars, which provides a support network for single-parent families in Watford and has over 240 members.

Hubs at the heart of our communities

Our hubs are also an important part of our communities and play host to an enormous range of different activities, from coffee mornings and exercise classes to violin lessons and counselling sessions.

The long-standing groups that our hubs host also continued to go from strength to strength throughout the year. The nursery based at Leavesden Green maintained its 'outstanding' OFSTED rating and our Nifty Fifties group has had a great response to the different events held at the Harebreaks Hub, including 'Lou's Moves' exercise classes and 'Craft and natter' sessions.

Although the coronavirus crisis meant that these groups could not continue to use our hubs during the lockdown, we continued to work with them throughout the pandemic to help them plan for the future and ensure that they can return as soon as it is safe to do so, within government guidelines.



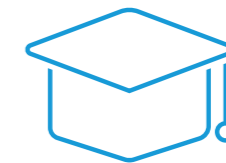
£57k invested in community projects



£6.7k allocated by our Community Chest, for projects under £500



28,216 visitors to our hubs in 2019/20



87 people took part in training opportunities through nine courses held at our hubs and spaces

Helping people gain skills and education

As part of our commitment to creating opportunities in our communities, we continued to run training courses to help people learn new skills and get more out of life. Through 2019/20 we held a range of courses and sessions:



Paediatric first aid

Four courses attended by 40 participants with Engie, our improvement programme contractor



Succeed and get that job

An employability training session with five participants



Public speaking

A course attended by six participants



Safeguarding children

A course with 11 participants



Complaints workshop

A course run by TPAS for six participants, who now volunteer to sit on review panels as part of our feedback process



Scarecrow-making

A fun session with 19 participants



Representing you

As a Community Gateway organisation, we put people at the heart of our work. Made up of Watford Community Housing customers and people from our local communities, the Gateway Membership Team act as your representatives in the organisation. In 2019/20, the team worked on a range of projects to deliver improvements.

Making sure residents' voices are heard

The Gateway Membership Team organised three Tenant Question Time events in 2019/20. The first of these focused on the question of 'Where does the money go?', giving residents the chance to ask questions and find out more about how we spend money, including how service charges are calculated, how much it costs us to maintain homes, how we allocate community funding and how much is invested in building new homes.

Scrutinising our services

One of the key contributions made by the Gateway Membership Team is overseeing and getting involved with scrutiny reviews of our services. Last year, they looked at our voids and lettings process, which covers one of the most important steps for our customers – the start of their tenancy.

Members of the team met with Watford Community Housing staff and shadowed them as new customers were being signed up, to understand how we do things and provide feedback on how we could make the process better. Following this review, we have made some improvements to make sure that new tenants have all the information and advice they need to get the most out of their tenancy.

The Gateway Membership Team also helps to steer our policies and in 2019/20 they were part of an extensive consultation to put customers' interests at the heart of our Tenancy Policy, which will be launched in 2020/21.

Listening to customer feedback

The Gateway Membership Team has been working with our Customer Relations team to monitor the types of compliments and complaints we get from customers.

By looking closely at this data, the team helped to identify areas that scrutiny reviews should concentrate on in future, to reflect what customers care about most. Using this information, they will be involved in reviewing both our anti-social behaviour service and how we communicate with customers about follow-on repairs in 2020/21

The team also worked with other residents to help ensure a fair outcome for customers who have made complaints. They received training from TPAS, the tenant engagement expert, in how to assess complaints as part of our feedback process and have since carried out panel reviews to make sure that these cases are considered fairly, in line with our policies and procedures.

Adding fresh faces to the team

The Gateway Membership Team are always on the lookout for new people to add their expertise and insight, as well as making sure that the team is diverse and reflects all of our customers. In 2019/20, several new members were recruited to the team, bringing a wealth of experience from the transport and emergency services sectors.



A word from the Gateway Membership Team

Chris Blackett is Chair of the Gateway Membership Team – here's what she had to say about its work in 2019/20:

“We are building a really strong relationship with the team at Watford Community Housing. We feel like our input is valued and I'm very proud of what we were able to do to help improve services for residents last year.

“By working with staff on the scrutiny reviews, we are making sure that services keep getting better. We have helped to improve the voids and lettings service and we're also going to be involved with the review of the anti-social behaviour services.

“We've started working directly with the Group Board, so we are definitely seen as important and we are being

listened to. We are also building strong foundations with different teams throughout the organisation, such as the Asset & Compliance team, who we have an amazing relationship with. They don't do anything without consulting us now and we will be working with them on setting a new Homes Standard, as well as influencing the works carried out through the improvement programme to make sure they meet residents' expectations.

“We're really pleased with how it's working across all departments. It's very positive – such a lot of good things are happening now and we feel like we are really able to make a difference.”



Building new homes



We are committed to building new homes that give more people the chance to live comfortably, safely and affordably. We build high-quality housing across a range of tenure types, with a focus on providing homes for social and affordable rent for people on lower incomes. Here's what we achieved in 2019/20.

Revitalising neighbourhoods

We completed several high-profile developments last year, helping to rejuvenate areas with new homes and offer more people the opportunity of somewhere better to live. These included the new development at The Brow, where we provided a brand new parade of eight shops for local residents as well as 38 homes – a mix of affordable rent, shared ownership and three large family homes for social rent.

Our development of 46 new homes at Boundary Way was also completed, along with the first three homes to be provided as part of our regeneration of the Meriden in Garston. These homes were the bungalows on York Way and they are the first of 133 homes that will be built as part of a project that will also deliver an expanded community hub, a flexicare facility for older people, a brand new parade of shops and new green spaces.

Working in partnership to build social homes

We're committed to delivering homes for social rent, for those in greatest need. We're working in partnership with Watford Borough Council on a programme to provide much-needed social housing at a number of sites. In 2019/20 we got planning permission for the majority

of the programme, which will include deliver 55 homes for social rent in total. We also appointed Jarvis as our contractor, who started on site in January 2020.

Our commercial arm and joint ventures

As well as building homes directly through Watford Community Housing, we also have a commercial arm called Clarendon Living, which delivers new homes both independently and as the partner in our joint ventures with local authorities.

Last year saw Clarendon Living complete its first independent scheme, which consisted of nine homes for market sale in Puckeridge, East Hertfordshire. Because we are a not-for-profit organisation, all of Clarendon Living's profits go back into Watford Community Housing – by selling homes on the open housing market we can generate money so that we have more to invest in affordable homes, as well as providing family homes in the process.

We also made progress with plans to deliver more homes through our Hart Homes joint venture with Watford Borough Council. We received planning permission for a second phase of development near Croxley View, which will see 86 new homes built.



125 new homes completed

288 under construction at
the end of 2019/20



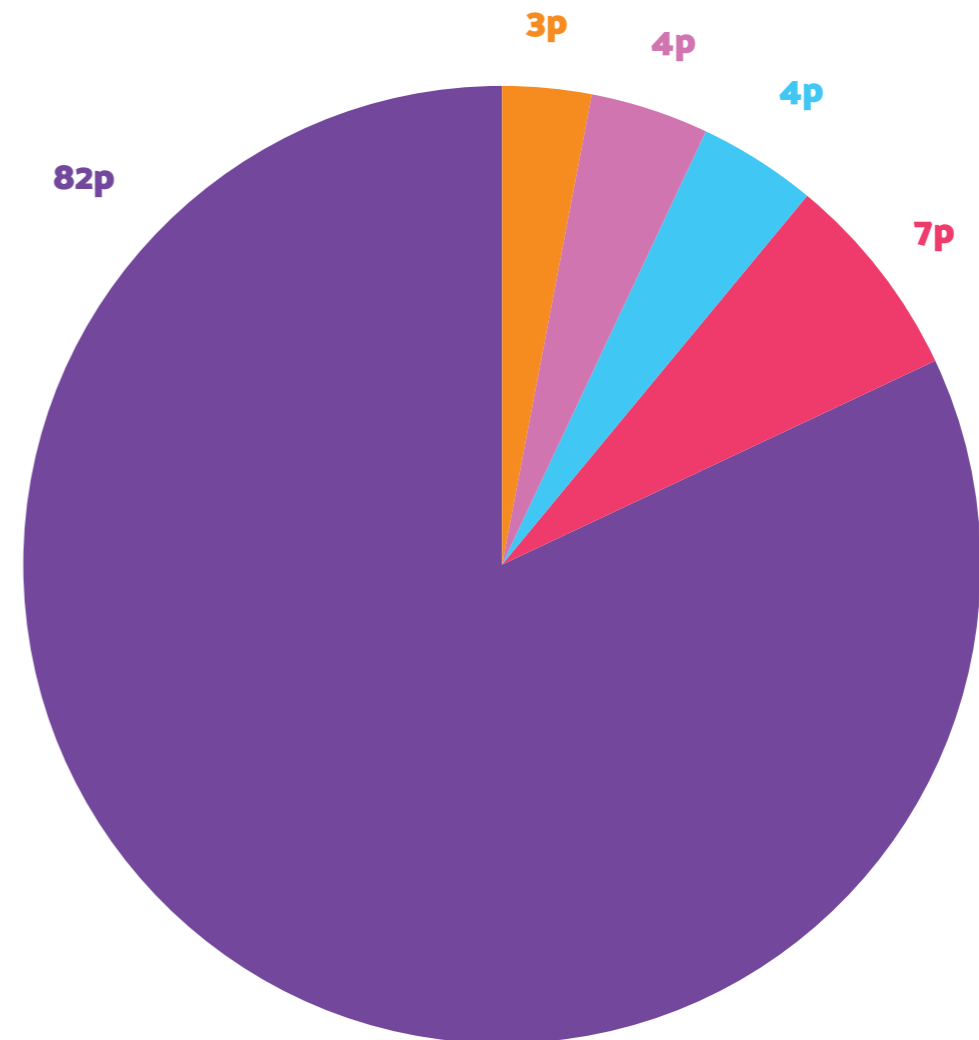
Value for money

We're committed to being transparent about how we make money and how we spend it too. Our aim is to maintain a strong financial position so that we can continue to provide high-quality services, while delivering value for money for our customers.



Where our money comes from

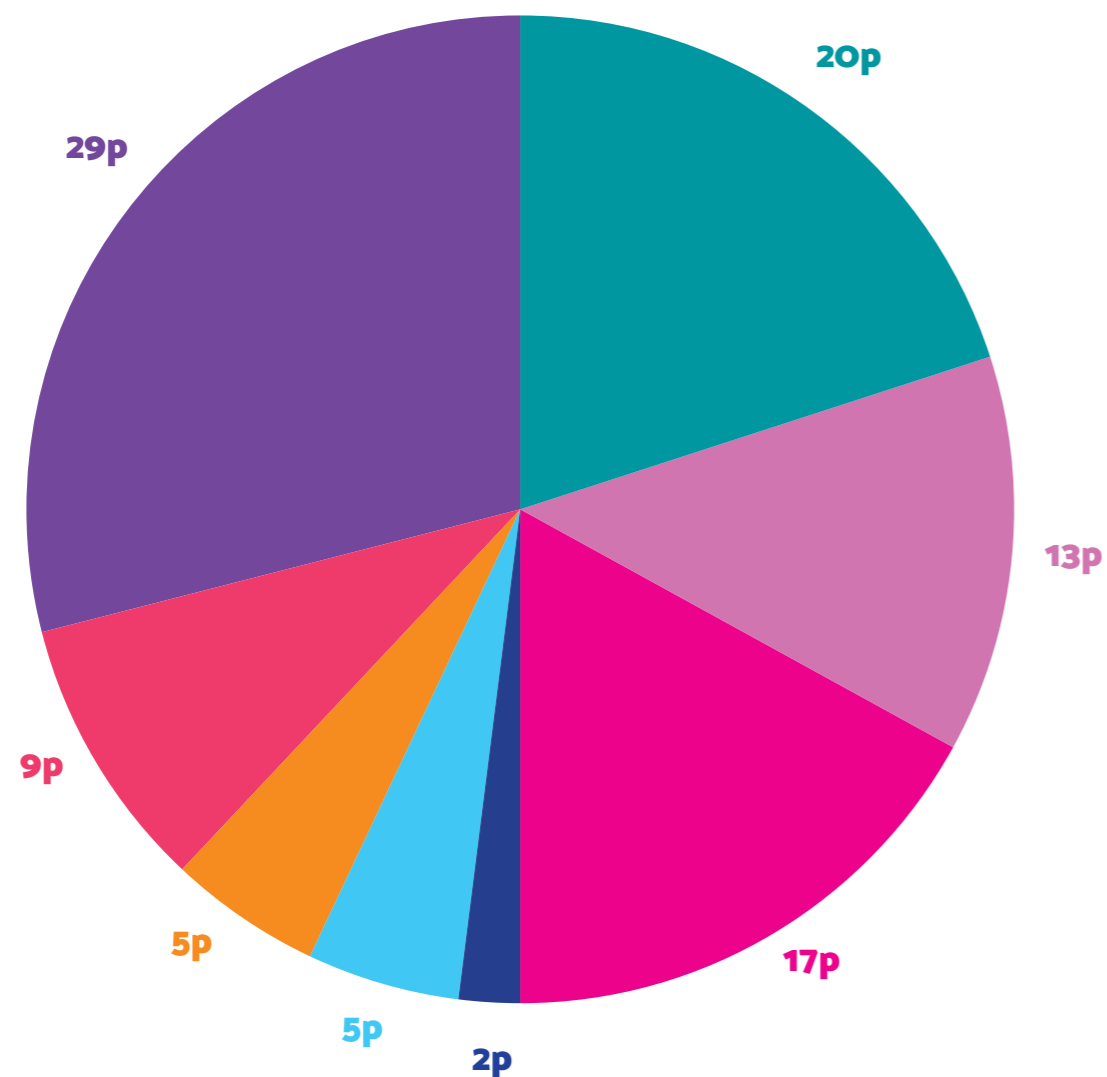
For every £1 we generate:



- **82p** is from social housing lettings
- **7p** is from the sale of shared ownership homes – the surplus generated from these sales is used to support our charitable objectives
- **4p** is from the service charge income (which is fully spent on providing services to our residents)
- **4p** is from non-social housing lettings – including our market rent properties and garages
- **3p** is from other sources – including the provision of management services for our external partners



How each pound was spent



Housing management costs including staff

We spent 29p in each pound to provide services to our customers and to pay for staffing costs and overheads.

Property maintenance

We spent 9p in each pound on repairs, servicing and maintenance, including work carried out as part of our improvement programme to deliver upgrades to your homes.

Construction costs

We spent 5p in each pound on building and selling properties for shared ownership.

Service charge costs

We spent 5p in each pound on heating, lighting, cleaning and other costs recoverable through service charges. We regularly benchmark our service charges against the wider housing association sector, which shows that our service charges are lower than the sector average.

Cost of delivering other services

We spent 2p in each pound on other costs including services to support people and community initiatives.

Property depreciation

17p in each pound accounted for the wear and tear of our assets, including the homes we own.

Interest and financing costs

We paid 13p in each pound to the bank as interest on our loans.

Surplus for reinvestment

20p in each pound will go towards delivering future improvements in our existing homes and building new homes in line with our business plan.

Read our full financial statements now at www.wcht.org.uk/reports



Your feedback

We want to know what you think of our services.
Let us know how we did this year by getting in touch!

You can email us at feedback@wcht.org.uk or call us on 0800 218 2247.



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